



# **JULIE LASSA**

## **STATE SENATOR**

### **Testimony of Senator Julie Lassa on Senate Bill 533 Senate Committee on Ethics Reform and Government Operations Wednesday, March 05, 2008**

Chairman Risser and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on Senate Bill 533, relating to adjusting the method used to set compensation levels of certain county constitutional officers.

In April of 2004, an amendment to the state constitution increased the term length for all county constitutional officers from two to four years. This change was supported by the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA). However, the amendment did not address the process by which compensation for these positions are established. Currently, Statute 59.22(1) indicates a county board must establish the total annual compensation for county constitutional officers before the earliest filing deadline for nomination papers. This statute worked well for constitutional officers with two-year terms, where a base salary and fringe benefit package were set for the first year of the term and one general base adjustment for the second year. However, with the longer term length, county supervisors have concerns with setting annual wage and fringe benefit adjustments. Supervisors are now required to set the base wage and fringe benefit package with three adjustments for the remaining three years of the term. This has proven to be difficult because supervisors have to project expenditures and budgets four years into the future and also because it may set precedents for union contract negotiations.

The Wisconsin County Constitutional Officers (WCCO) and the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) have come together to seek legislation to fix this problem. Under this bill, a county board must annually adjust the compensation level based on average adjustments to compensation given to all county department heads in the year immediately proceeding the current year.

Senate Bill 533 will help county supervisors set compensation levels for county constitutional officers at a time when they have the necessary information to make such a decision. Each year's compensation level will be assessed with accurate information, instead of guessing at all the factors that impact the fiscal condition of the county. Since some constitutional offices will come up for election next fall, it is important to get this statute change as soon as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.